Your heat went out and the house is getting cold.

What to do when the furnace or the power quits in winter: keep one room warm, protect your pipes, and stay clear of carbon monoxide. Free steps first.

READ FIRST

If any of these happen, act first

! **Never heat the house with fuel-burning gear**
Generators, grills, camp stoves and gas ovens stay out of the house, the basement and the garage, per the CDC. Run a generator outside, more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents.

! **If the CO alarm sounds or anyone feels sick**
Get everyone into fresh air right away, per the Red Cross, then call 911. Headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea and confusion are the warning signs, per the CDC.

FREE, RIGHT NOW

Start with these — they cost nothing

- [ ] Pick one room and close off the rest
  a small room with few windows holds heat best. The CDC says to close off rooms you don't need.
- [ ] Block drafts
  roll towels into the gaps under doors, and cover windows with blankets at night, per the CDC.
- [ ] Let faucets drip
  a slow drip and open cabinet doors under the sinks help keep pipes from freezing, per the CDC.
- [ ] Layer up and keep eating
  loose layers, hats and warm drinks help. The CDC says to skip alcohol and caffeine, which make your body lose heat faster.
- [ ] Test your carbon monoxide alarm
  press the test button now. The CDC says to have one near every sleeping area.
- [ ] Check on the people next door
  a quick knock on day one matters most for anyone living alone.

FIRST HOUR

Hold the heat you have

- [ ] Find out why: check the thermostat, the breaker and the furnace switch, and call your utility or a repair service.
- [ ] Close off unused rooms and move everyone into one room, per the CDC.
- [ ] Start the faucets dripping and open the cabinet doors under the sinks, per the CDC.
- [ ] Test the carbon monoxide alarm before anyone sleeps.

General guidance for household planning — not professional advice. In an emergency, follow your local authorities and call 911.

FIRST DAY

Keep one room livable

- [ ] Cover the windows with blankets at night and keep the curtains closed, per the CDC and the National Weather Service.
- [ ] Dress everyone in loose layers and keep eating and drinking, per the National Weather Service.
- [ ] Use an electric space heater only if the power is on: plug it straight into the wall and keep it 3 feet from anything that burns, per the CDC and NFPA.
- [ ] Keep food in the fridge and freezer, not in the snow. The USDA says snow isn't a safe fridge.

IF IT LASTS

Decide whether to stay

- [ ] If the house keeps getting colder, go to a warming center, library or mall, per the Red Cross.
- [ ] If you have a baby, the CDC says to stay somewhere warm rather than let them sleep in a cold room.
- [ ] Before you leave, the Red Cross says to keep the heat at 55°F or higher if you can, so pipes don't freeze while you're gone.

KNOW THE LINE

When it’s more than an inconvenience

- **Call 911: The carbon monoxide alarm goes off, or anyone has a headache, dizziness, nausea or confusion with fuel-burning gear nearby (per the CDC).**
- **Call 911: Someone shows signs of hypothermia: shivering, confusion, slurred speech, fumbling hands or drowsiness. A body temperature below 95°F is an emergency, per the CDC.**
- **Call 911: A baby has bright red, cold skin and very low energy, per the CDC.**
- **Leave: The house can't be kept warm and you have a baby, an older adult or anyone ill at home (per the CDC).**
- **Leave: Someone relies on medical equipment that needs power, per the Red Cross.**
- **Leave: You smell gas: leave, then call the gas company or 911 from outside, per NFPA.**

WORTH KNOWING

Easy mistakes to avoid

- **Heating the house with the oven**
  A gas oven left open for warmth makes carbon monoxide. The CDC says never to heat your home with one.
- **Running a generator in the garage**
  Even with the door open, it isn't safe. The CDC says to run it outside, more than 20 feet from windows, doors and vents.
- **Thawing a pipe with a flame**
  The Red Cross says to use a hair dryer, heating pad or hot wet towels, never a torch or a propane heater, and to keep the faucet open while you thaw.
- **Plugging a space heater into an extension cord**
  Space heaters draw a lot of power. The CDC and NFPA say to plug them straight into the wall and turn them off when you leave the room or go to bed.

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- **Putting food out in the snow**
  Sun warms it and animals find it. The USDA says not to. Keep the fridge and freezer shut instead: about 4 hours for the fridge and up to 48 for a full freezer.

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